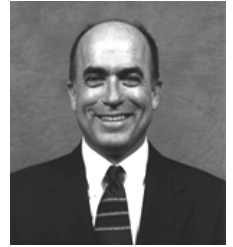




5TH DISTRICT NEWS



DWIGHT PELZ

A REPORT FROM KING COUNTY COUNCILMEMBER DWIGHT PELZ

September 2000

Dear friends and neighbors:

As I'm sure many of you know, Sheriff Reichert recently threatened to cut some of his important community policing programs, specifically the Boulevard Park and Skyway community storefronts, which are in the two areas of unincorporated King County that I represent. He announced these cuts in response to a negative audit of cost overruns in overtime within the Sheriff's department. The audit questioned why overtime had rapidly escalated for a department in a time when there are fewer crimes, fewer calls for services and fewer people to be served by the department.

I am deeply concerned about the closures of the storefronts. I am a strong advocate of community policing and community storefronts, and my office has had a long and productive working relationship with Deputies Darren Young and Alex Quirit in Skyway and Anthony Vowell and Esther Mulligan in Boulevard Park. The relationships they have built in these communities and their knowledge of their issues are invaluable tools for effective policing.

I do have questions about the priorities and politics behind the Sheriff's decision to make community policing the first victim of his budget balancing. I believe the Sheriff's office, like all County departments, must live within its budget, and that includes controlling its overtime expenses. We live in an era where voters, through citizens initiatives, are demanding the steady reduction in the size of government. However, Sheriff Reichert, as a dedicated police officer, strongly believes that the County Council

should not be challenging his excessive spending - in fact, he has identified areas where he believes his mission should be expanded.

I was as surprised as anyone to learn of his plan to scale back policing activities. I first learned of the closure of the storefronts by an e-mail from the community on Tuesday, August 8. I received no advance notification from the Sheriff. I had no opportunity as your Councilmember to take steps which would have averted these cuts.

"I have questions about the priorities and politics behind the Sheriff's decision to make community policing the first victim of this budget balance."

Editorials in several leading newspapers have been published which ask important questions the sheriff must answer to explain his budget requests. Several of them have been reprinted in this newsletter, and I think you will find them helpful in exposing the truth of this issue.

King County government must make increasingly difficult decisions in the years ahead as we budget for the many services we provide for the public, including policing, the courts, the jails, the Prosecutor's office, public health and mental health.

Over the next few weeks the County Council will be asking for answers and will work on finding constructive solutions to the Sheriff's budget problems. I hope you will contact me with any questions or concerns about this or other matters here at the County. You can reach at 206-296-1005, or e-mail me at dwright.pelz@metrokc.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "D. Pelz", with a large, stylized "P" and "L".

Dwight Pelz, Councilmember
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PROFILING SHERIFF REICHERT'S BUDGET

KING County Sheriff Dave Reichert has a flair for the dramatic, if not a knack for bookkeeping.

He is wrestling with the Metropolitan King County Council over a shortfall in his budget brought on in part by Initiative 695.

His petulant response was straight out of the handbook issued school superintendents for levy elections. Pick the most political, emotional budget items and threaten them with harm: Vote for schools or varsity sports will get the ax.

Reichert's latest target is the community officers scattered throughout the council districts. Earlier this summer, he was going to beach water patrols if money was not forthcoming.

What needs to be forthcoming is

a sense: the sheriff has a grasp on his own budget and staff.

The county auditor ripped the sheriff for sloppy accounting and management practices with overtime pay. With a better handle on overtime and the money the council is offering, maybe his office would not have as great a shortfall.

Part of what puzzled the auditor was the need for so much overtime in a department where the patrol area and workload are shrinking.

The council does its job when it asks tough questions of all department heads and the elected officials in the courts and prosecutor's office.

If the sheriff struggles to defend his budget, and can't answer the questions, that is not the council's fault.

P-I OPINION Public services held hostage by sheriff

Sheriff Dave Reichert's political extortion again gives King County residents reason to lament the folly of having an elected rather than appointed sheriff.

This is the second time in less than two months that Reichert has threatened to cut popular services if he didn't get his budgetary way with the County Council. Just before the July 4 weekend, the sheriff vowed to ground the department's helicopter and marine patrol if he didn't get more money.

It worked then, so it probably should come as no surprise that Reichert is now threatening a Sept. 1 wholesale slashing of programs, including community storefront services, unless the County Council gives his department as much as \$800,000 more this year.

The sheriff's demands come on the heels of a report by King County Auditor Ron Eklund that was critical of the department's tracking of overtime hours. Overtime rose 36 percent between 1994 and 1998, to more than \$700,000 last year, even though crime rates dropped during the same period.

If there are fewer crimes, fewer calls for service and fewer people to be served by the department, then some on the council ask the reasonable question: Why does the sheriff need more money for overtime?

The sheriff might well argue that the increased spending for overtime and other things is the reason crime rates are down. But why, then, would the sheriff propose cutting the same community-based policing programs he credited in July with having helped cut crime?

Such questions and issues could be objectively managed were the sheriff appointed by and serving at the pleasure of the county executive.

An appointed sheriff takes his budget case to the executive. An elected sheriff, on the other hand, will always be tempted to make his case, as Reichert has, to the public, where the threat of being fired exists only every four years.

Hence, we must suffer Reichert declaring from atop his moral high horse that "I will not make my decisions based on politics."

What we need from the sheriff is less pontificating and more justifying — both of his department's ill-tracked, if not excessive, overtime hours and of the program cuts he has threatened.